Fray Servando Teresa de Mier — Notes on the Sermon of December 12, 1794

(Given at the sanctuary of Our Lady of Guadalupe, Mexico City)

On the day of the Holy Virgin of Guadalupe, I preached that the image which we venerate on the tilma of Juan Diego is not, as is commonly believed, a new revelation of 1531, but the very same image which Saint Thomas the Apostle brought to these lands when he came to preach the Gospel.

I declared that the Apostle Thomas, after preaching in India, crossed the ocean to this other world, which he found long before the Spaniards, and that here he was known under the name Quetzalcóatl, that is, “the plumed serpent,” a name signifying the wisdom from heaven joined to the flesh of man.

He taught these peoples the worship of the true God, the use of the cross, fasting, confession, and even a prophecy of a virgin who would bear the Son of the Sun. In memory of her, he left on a cloak the image which we now call Our Lady of Guadalupe.

Thus the Mexicans, when the Spaniards arrived, already held among their ancient traditions the memory of a white-robed man who forbade human sacrifice, healed the sick, and promised to return from the East. That was the Apostle himself.

Therefore, the conversion of this New Spain was not, as many claim, a new conquest of souls, but rather a restoration of the ancient faith once preached here by one of the disciples of Our Lord.

I added that the tilma of Juan Diego is not painted by any mortal hand. The holy image existed before the conquest, and when the Apostle departed, he hid it in Tepeyac, saying that in the fullness of time it would be found again.

When Juan Diego opened his cloak before Bishop Zumárraga, the same image shone forth anew, as a sign that the true faith was returning to its ancient home.

If the Mexicans had once known Christ through the Apostle Thomas, then the Spaniards did not bring God to these shores; they only returned to Him what was already His.

For this reason the devotion to Our Lady of Guadalupe is not foreign to Christianity but its most ancient root in this land. She is not the Virgin of Spain, but of Anáhuac, where the Gospel was first preached by one sent from the side of the Redeemer Himself.

I concluded that the dignity of the Mexican Church rests on this foundation: that it received the faith not from conquerors, but from an Apostle, and that our people are not the latest to receive the word of God, but among the first.
(End of notes submitted by Fray Servando Teresa de Mier to the ecclesiastical censors following his sermon of December 12, 1794.)

Archival reference: “Apuntes del sermón de 12 de diciembre de 1794,” in Obras completas de Fray Servando Teresa de Mier, vol. 1 (Mexico: UNAM, 1946), pp. 83–87; also transcribed at filosofia.org/aut/001/17941214.htm.